

Longer by Nqllisi

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Language: English

Characters: Eleven/Jane H., J. Hopper, Joyce B., Mike W.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2017-11-28 09:35:12

Updated: 2017-12-13 08:14:03

Packaged: 2019-12-17 03:06:00

Rating: K+

Chapters: 2

Words: 2,515

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: The Party is back in Hawkins, with alarming plans for their future.

1. Chapter 1

Longer

"Hey Chief. Sorry to keep you waiting." Chief Hopper looked up from the morning paper. The younger man sat down in the chair across from him at the sticky diner table.

"Nah, it's OK. I just got here. Need some coffee?"

"Um, no. Thanks." Mike reached out and grabbed the chipped white coffee mug on the saucer and held it in his hands, frowning slightly as he examined the flaws.

"So." Mike looked up, as though he'd almost forgotten Hopper was there. The Chief sipped his coffee deliberately. "What's on your mind, kid?"

Mike took a deep breath and met Hopper's eyes squarely. "You can't guess?"

"Don't play games, kid. You called *me*. What's this about?"

"It's about El." Mike didn't look much like the gawky youngster he'd been in his tweens. He'd remained tall, but his shoulders had filled out. His hair was shorter now, and he was wearing a goatee like every other guy his age. Mike's expression, however, reminded the Chief strongly of all those moments of fear and confusion they'd spent together so many years ago. He was pale, but his features remained resolute and determined.

Hopper set his cup down on the table. "And what about El, *exactly*?" He was older now, not quite as fit, but Jim Hopper still knew how to intimidate a suspect with his voice and his manner.

Mike didn't flinch. In fact, he grinned wryly. "I kept my word, Chief. I did what you asked. I went away to school. I gave her time and space."

"*Hmph*. You still called every day."

"Yeah, almost every day. Well over 2,000 long-distance calls."

"Jesus, kid. Your phone bills must be insane."

"Don't change the subject. I kept my word, and now I'm back. And I am going to marry your daughter."

Hopper cringed. He gulped down another swallow of coffee to warm the sudden icy chill in his gut. "Look, kid—"

"I'm not a kid anymore. And neither is she. We've both waited and nothing has changed." Mike slumped down in his chair. "I know everybody meant well. Yes, we had a weirdly...intense...relationship for a couple of kids, but it was real. It's always been real." He turned the mug over in his hands.

"I even went on dates. Did you know that? We agreed to try dating other people. So I got to hear her tell me about guys who took her out. I swear, it's a good thing I'm not the one with powers..." Mike grimaced, pretending that he was joking.

"And I even asked out some really nice girls. But, I mean, it was never going to work. Because none of them were as smart, or pretty, or interesting as El. None of them were as strong or brave, because they'd never had to be. But the main thing? Not one of them *ever* looked at me the way she does."

Hopper clenched his teeth and let out a short breath. "I know it's been hard. For both of you. But I really think you needed time to be sure. I didn't want either of you to get hurt."

Mike nodded. "I know. But now that I'm done with school and have a job lined up, I don't see any reason to wait any more. And..." he paused. "And I'm not really sure I care what you have to say about it anymore, either."

Much to his own surprise, the Chief started to laugh. "Kid, I'm surprised you listened to me in the first place. *She* sure as hell wasn't listening—she'd have been on the first bus if you had ever told her to come." Hopper laughed even harder at the expression on Mike's face. "So what's this job, anyway?" he finally managed to choke out.

It was Mike's turn to smile. "The job I've been working toward for the last seven years, Hopper. I got Doctor Owens to refer me in. I'm starting Monday at Hawkins Lab."

Every trace of amusement drained from Jim Hopper's face. "What the hell did you just say to me?"

"I said, we are re-opening Hawkins Lab. Owens came out of retirement to hand-pick the team. I've been studying psychology and crypto biology for the last seven years just so I could get in there. I am going to find out what happened up there. I am going to find out what, exactly, they did to her."

"And El knows?"

"Of course she knows. What do you think we've been talking about on the phone for the last 2,300 nights?"

Hopper rubbed his eyes. "Dammit, Mike. Are you sure this is a good idea? For either of you? That place is best left alone."

"I'm sure. So is she. Trust us."

The Chief drained his cup. "I just—I don't want her to get hurt. That's all. I've been trying to protect her all these years and—"

Mike leaned forward and looked square in Jim Hopper's eyes again. "I told you, I'm going to marry her. Do you think I'm going to let anybody hurt her? Nothing is going to touch her."

The two men locked eyes. Hopper's were troubled, but Mike's were blazing. "I've loved her longer than you have, Chief."

2. Chapter 2

Longer, chapter 2: Old Wounds

"Hello?" Hop called into the house from the entry as he came in.

"Hey, there. You're home early." Joyce emerged, smiling, from the kitchen. It had taken them longer—years longer—to get together than their kids and friends had expected. The wounds and stresses of life had broken them both in too many places, and each had to heal some before they could figure out how their pieces fit together.

They had finally found their way back to each other, though, and had formed a family that included more than just their own kids. Which was why Hop was somewhat surprised that there were no 20-somethings currently lingering in their living room.

"Where is everybody?" he asked.

Joyce shrugged. "Will's still at work, I think. Janey's in her room." Joyce gestured down the hallway toward the room that had been Jonathan's when her kids had been younger. Jonathan had moved away, leaving Hawkins far behind, years before the chief and his adopted daughter, Jane, had moved in.

Jane Hopper. Eleven. The young woman who had come a long way since the night that Hop had carried her traumatized, dehydrated, and exhausted from Hawkins Lab after closing the gate on the Mind Flayer.

They'd taken Dr. Owens's suggestion to keep her hidden for a year. Instead of a punishment or a purgatory, they'd decided that the time was best used for preparation. The kids had all helped to tutor her, getting her ready to join their class academically. Hop, Joyce, even Jonathan and Nancy, had taken turns driving her to cities far enough away that they could practice eating in restaurants, shopping in stores, and navigating through crowds. Dustin Henderson, a constant shadow of concern in his face, had spent countless hours getting her up to speed on pop cultural things that a kid their age "should just know."

She'd struggled some at first, but soon caught up in school, graduated with honors, earned a college degree, and was back in Hawkins working and living at home. She emerged from her room and was now half-smiling at her father in greeting.

"Hi," she said. She tilted her head, expectantly. Jane was a lovely girl of average height, with dark, shoulder-length hair that she straightened, and big, serious eyes. Her smile would flash unexpectedly and then disappear just as quickly, but there was nothing unkind in her direct gaze.

"Hello, there," the chief said sarcastically. "I had a visit today from a friend of yours. 'Doc' Wheeler had two very interesting things to discuss with me that I was not quite prepared for."

"I know."

"Oh, you *know*. Of course you do. You've known about this for years, I take it. But you know what, Janey? That doesn't make it a good idea."

Joyce's face creased in concern, a look that she didn't wear as much as she used to. "What are you talking about? What's going on?"

"Mike's new job," Eleven answered.

The Chief snorted. "Mike's new job? Mike's NEW JOB? Joyce, they are re-opening Hawkins Lab! Mike and Owens and God knows who else. This was Mike's whole plan to go to school and study—science and whatever—so he could convince Owens to re-open Hawkins Lab!"

Joyce looked stunned. "What? No. Why? To do what?"

Eleven's placid brow furrowed slightly at the panic in Joyce's voice. "To study. To find out what happened. To Will. And me. And the others."

Joyce reached out and grabbed Eleven's arm. "I *don't* understand. That place is—no. No. That place is—it's dangerous and whatever happened there needs to stay there, locked up and buried. Forever."

"But I need to know." El grabbed Joyce's hand and squeezed it. She

walked into the kitchen and sat down at the table. Hopper and Joyce both followed her in and sat down.

"I wasn't alone there. I wasn't the only child they stole and used." She pulled her sleeve up, exposing her faded old tattoo. "Eleven. There were at least ten others. I met Eight. Kali."

"What? When?" Hopper interjected.

"A long time ago. They hurt us. P—Papa, and the rest of them. Mike can help me find out what they did to us, so maybe I can find the others and help them."

Hop sighed deeply, and Joyce leaned across the table. "Sweetheart, I understand why you want this, but that place is too dangerous. All of those scientists died, all of those soldiers died, and poor little Barbie Holland, and Bob." Her voice caught. "And what happened to Will..."

"But Will wants to know, too. He wants us to do this." She was getting frustrated, and it was coming through in her voice. Fortunately, over the years Eleven had made great strides in tamping down her temper. She very rarely lost control of her powers any more.

Hop threw his head back with another massive sigh. He, too, had learned to control his temper since he and his adopted daughter had first started out together. Joyce, on the other hand, suddenly looked fragile and frantic. "Will knows about this?"

Eleven nodded. "That's why Mike wants to do this. For both of us. We *need* to know."

There was a moment of silence. Suddenly, Jim Hopper's posture changed. From freaked-out parent, he suddenly transformed into a police chief. "You, Mike, and Will came up with this plan before he ever left for college." It wasn't a question, but his level gaze demanded an answer. Eleven nodded.

"You think that being in that facility, part of that...team...will get you access to answers about what happened to you, and what happened to Will."

"Yes."

"Mike said Dr. Owens is in on this. Owens retired years ago. How did Mike get in touch with the super-secret scientist?"

Eleven averted her gaze. "I—he stayed in touch with me. And Will. I gave Mike his phone number."

"I cannot believe that man—," Joyce started to cut in.

Hop held up a finger to keep her from derailing his interrogation. "Yeah, yeah, but here's the thing. So what?"

Joyce looked at him blankly, but El looked away. Hop's voice grew stronger as he closed in. "So Mike called him and asked him for a job. So, what? Owens doesn't come out of retirement, find funding, recruit a team, and re-open a decrepit, out of date old lab in the middle of nowhere because Mike Wheeler asked him to. Did he, Jane?"

She turned to look back at him. "No."

"No. I didn't think so. So what's the angle? What's in it for him? What does he get, *Eleven*?"

Joyce gasped, while El pushed her lips together and took in a deep breath. "Me. He gets to study me. What I can do. How much, how strong. He wants to know, and so do I."

She shook her head slightly. "Look, you both have given me a great, normal life. But I'm *not* normal. And I still don't understand all the things I can do, or why, or what they did to me in that place. I need to know."

"I do not understand or agree with this," Joyce said quietly. "And I am furious that you all decided this without—without talking to us or discussing it. I just...what if things start happening again? What if it all comes for Will again?" A decade had passed, but the fear in Joyce's voice was as immediate as the day Will had first vanished. Hop glanced at the wall where he had repaired a hole, once, and reached for his wife's hand.

"I don't like this, Janey," he said.

"I'm sorry. But we'll be careful."

Joyce pushed her chair away from the table. "No. This is not OK." She dashed to the master bedroom and slammed the door. They could hear her crying through the door.

Hop and Eleven sat in silence for a moment. Hop reached for his pocket, a habit he maintained even years after he'd finally quit smoking for good. He let his hand drop back to the table top.

"Dad?" El questioned quietly.

"Yeah, kid."

"What else did you and Mike talk about?"

"What?"

"You said he had 'two' interesting pieces of news. What else?"

He said he wants to marry you. The words were on the tip of his tongue, but Hop stopped himself just in time. Mike hadn't said if he and El had already talked about this or not. As angry and worried as he was, this was his daughter. He surely wasn't going to ruin a surprise proposal, if Mike had something like that planned. And knowing Mike, he had something elaborate and cheesy as hell planned.

"Just, uh, you know, that you all had been planning this for so long. You guys and Will, you know? Yeah, um, that this was the plan, and that now, it's finally happening. Those two things."

His daughter frowned. She could always tell if he was lying. Her face cleared, as though she decided to let him get away with it. "OK, Dad. You know I love you, right? We'll be careful."

"I hope you know what you're doing, kid."